

The Air Force Strings

In current events, the Strings continue performances for both military and civilian audiences throughout the United States. On February 7, the Strings performed in Warsaw, Virginia, in a program that included Vivaldi's *Concerto in G, opus 26, no. 16*. MSgt Vivian Podgainy, the group's principal cellist, was the soloist. Also featured was the rarely performed *Notturmo in B Major* by Dvorak and *Sinfonia No. 8 in D major* by Mendelssohn. Look for us on at 7:30 p.m. on March 10, when we present a concert at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in California, Maryland. We will also make an appearance in Shepardstown, West Virginia, for an 8 p.m. concert on April 27 at Shepard College. In addition to Sunday afternoon concerts for the Guest Artist Series at DAR Constitution Hall, the Strings will stroll for military audiences in the local area. We will also travel to Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina, Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana, and McClellan Air Force Base in California to support various military functions.

In honor of Women's History Month, this column recognizes SMSgt (ret) Mary Atwood, the first woman to join the Air Force Strings. Mary enlisted in the Air Force as a violist in 1974. Since then, 25 women have joined the Strings. Currently, the group has seven women, making up one third of the group.

Mary was drawn to music at an early age, influenced by her mother, who was a professional violinist. Though it was violin studies that she began at a young age, the viola's dark, velvet sound was what especially appealed to her. In high school, after only one day as a substitute violist in orchestra, Mary switched to the viola. She grew up in the Washington, D.C. area, earning many honors, and continued her musical studies at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, and then at Temple University's New School of Music in Philadelphia. Following this, Mary freelanced in Washington, D.C., Baltimore and Philadelphia, performing with orchestras including the National Ballet Orchestra in Washington, D.C. When Mary won the viola position in the Strings, she was pleased to see several familiar faces of Air Force musicians with whom she had freelanced. On occasion, she was the featured soloist with the String Orchestra, and one especially memorable performance took place in Graz, Austria, in July 1980, at the eighth International Viola Congress. She played Telemann's *Concerto for*



Mary Atwood performs for former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and guests.

Two Violas with guest soloist Robert Schaeffer. She performed strolling, string orchestra and chamber music repertoire with the Strings for listeners throughout the United States and around the world. In addition to many special musical memories, Mary recalls one day in Egypt before an evening performance when she rode on horseback in the desert around the pyramids. In addition to her musical talents, Air Force musicians who worked with her fondly remember Mary's pleasant demeanor and optimistic leadership skills.

After playing with the Strings for ten years, SMSgt (ret) Atwood served as the special assistant to former Band commanders Arnald Gabriel, James Bankhead and Alan Bonner. Following this, she managed the Pacific Air Forces Air Command Band in Alaska for four years, until her retirement from the military. While in Anchorage, she studied Human Services at Wayland University. She has retired to Calvert County, Maryland, where she is an active volunteer in her community, with Catholic charities, her community's newsletter and a professional financial planning organization. Congratulations and bravo to the Air Force Strings' very own first lady!

—TSgt Erin Eyles Espinoza



Have you got questions? We've got answers.

The United States Air Force Band appreciates the patronage of its thousands of customers. We strive to keep in touch with the needs of our audiences. There are several different ways for our friends to reach us to get information and voice concerns. Besides the bi-monthly *Cadenza*, information about the Band can be

found on our site on the World Wide Web. Our web address is:

<http://www.bolling.af.mil/band>

Our Concert Line is updated continually to keep the latest performance information available to all our customers. Feel free to call

anytime at (202) 767-5658. Of course, we always appreciate hearing from friends by mail. If you need to contact us with questions or comments, you can address your letters to:

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